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AUTHOR Greendorfer, Susan L.
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ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken in order to identify and describe the nature of socialization of females into sport. A fixed-alternative questionnaire was administered to 585 women who were currently active in sport. Results indicated that peers and family were the significant agents of socialization during childhood, peers and school were most significant during adolescence, and peers were most significant during adulthood. Also, a dominant influence from male rather than female role models was evident during childhood, partially evident during adolescence, but rejected at the adult stage as female role models became more significant. It was also found that a stronger reference group influence was associated with younger ages, while a stronger opportunity set was not. No statistically significant relationship was found in the comparison of correlations between reference group influence and active sport involvement. It was also found that sport type was a function of socioeconomic status. Team sport participants tended to come from a low socioeconomic background, while individual and dual sports participants were identified with a higher socioeconomic status. No relationship was found between sport type and family versus peer influence. Nor was any found when socioeconomic status and type of reference group influence were examined. (PB)

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FEMALE SPORT INVOLVEMENT

Susan L. Greendorfer
University of New Mexico

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Susan L. Greendorfer
University of New Mexico

The proliferation of books and research pertaining to the sociology of sport indicates the growth of interest and knowledge with respect to this sub-discipline. However, most theories and research have been limited to men's sports, and more often than not, the investigations have been concerned with elite athletes. In contrast "women in sport" has been a topic virtually ignored by sociologists, while the recent concern in physical education has focused on specific problems and issues inherent in the development of women's sports programs. With the exception of self-image and personality research on the female athlete, relatively few studies have utilized a social science perspective.

Although sport involvement can be viewed as a consequence of the process of socialization, this orientation has not been utilized to investigate female sport participation. There have been no studies concerned with the process whereby women become involved in sport--how they acquire the necessary skill, dispositions, interest, and experience to assume an active sport role. Thus, this investigation was an exploratory examination of the process of female socialization into sport. More specifically, it sought to identify and describe those factors which contributed to female sport participation in the case of women who were currently active in sport.

A sport socialization model, previously utilized on male athletes only, served as the basis from which several hypotheses could be generated. The use of this model allowed for a theoretical ordering of variables, an examination of their significance in temporal sequence, and a comparison of their importance relative

to one another. Six hypotheses were considered in reference to concepts pertaining to the social learning model. The concepts will be considered shortly.

A fixed-alternative questionnaire was administered to five hundred eighty-five women who participated in the Wisconsin Women's Intercollegiate Athletic Conference during the 1973-74 Academic Year. (This figure represented a total response of 83.69%.) The data obtained from these questionnaires were subjected to statistical analyses appropriate to the specific hypothesis under examination.

Socializing Agents and Sport Involvement

Multiple regression analyses revealed that female sport participants received the greatest amount of influence from peers throughout the three stages of the life cycle, while the family was a significant factor as well as peers during childhood. The school and peers were most influential at the adolescent stage. During young adulthood the family became less influential and perhaps was a discouraging factor. These findings suggest that the family and peers served as original stimuli to participate in sport; however, continued reinforcement for such involvement came from peers and perhaps the school. Within the context of temporal change in the significance of socializing agents, it was noted that the socialization model appropriate for childhood was not as suitable for explaining adolescent and adult involvement. For instance, the three independent variables (peers, family, school) explained 24.8% of the variance during childhood, whereas they explained 10.4% and 5.2% during adolescence and young adulthood, respectively.

A comparison between the sex of role models revealed that male role models were most significant during childhood and decreased in importance over the life cycle, while female role models became more significant as the life cycle progressed. When role

models were considered from the perspective of athletes only, males proved to be the dominant models at each stage of the life cycle. Nevertheless, the concept of role models accounted for only a small amount of variance in the social learning paradigm throughout the life cycle.

In summary two hypotheses related to the effect that significant others or socializing agents had on the female sport socialization process. Hypothesis one compared the influence of three social systems--family, peers, and school. Peers and family, not the school, were the significant agents of socialization during childhood, while peers and school were significant social systems during adolescence; and during adulthood peers were the most significant agents. Hypothesis two predicted a dominant influence from male rather than female role models. The expected relationship was found during childhood, was partially evident during adolescence, but was rejected at the adult stage because female role models became more significant than male models. However, when the role models variable was narrowed to athletes only, the hypothesis was accepted at each stage, since male athletes were the predominant models throughout the life cycle.

Socializing Situation and Sport Involvement

Two separate chi-square analyses were used to test the association between the level of reference group influence and the age of first sport involvement and the level of opportunity set and the age of first sport involvement. Although research has revealed that the potency of significant other influence and strength of opportunity set contribute substantially to sport role enactment, results from this study demonstrated that opportunity set was not associated with early age of sport involvement, whereas reference group influence was. High reference group influence was observed with younger ages of first sport involvement, while low reference

group influence was associated with older ages of first sport involvement (p .001). When levels of opportunity set were analyzed in connection to age of first sport involvement, the relationship found was not significant. However, a solid relationship (r = .399) did exist between opportunity set and reference group influence during childhood, which perhaps suggests that a different conceptualization of the effect of these variables is in order. Their influence may be sequential, not simultaneous, with reference groups providing the initial stimulus and opportunity set reinforcing the involvement once participation has been initiated.

It was also hypothesized that the greater the opportunity set, the less important the influence of reference groups on active sport involvement. However, no statistically significant correlations were observed between the reference group variable and active sport involvement variable for any levelof opportunity set (low, medium, or high). Nevertheless, as the life cycle progressed, a decreasing correlation between reference group influence and involvement was found. Moreover, an increasing correlation between opportunity set and active sport involvement was observed during adolescence and adulthood. Thus, some interplay between these variables was suggested by the data.

Two hypotheses dealt with the relationship between opportunity set and female sport involvement, with some consideration given to reference groups. One hypothesis examined the strength of opportunity set and the strength of reference group influence as indicators of age of first sport involvement. A stronger reference group influence was associated with younger ages, while a stronger opportunity set was not. Another hypothesis considered the level of opportunity set as a more influential variable than reference groups in determining sport involvement. Specifically, a higher opportunity set was thought to be associated with a low correlation

type of reference group influence and sport type (Kenyon, 1966, 1969).

To test the hypothesis that team sport participants are more influenced by peers, whereas individual and dual sport participants are more influenced by family, a Kruskal-Wallis One Way Analysis of Variance was utilized. The chi-square value was not significant, indicating that, according to sport type, no difference in influence could be determined when peer group was compared to family. Additional data further indicated that there was no association between either measure of socio-economic status and kind of reference group influence (i.e., family versus peers). Such findings are contrary to the notion that higher social class background is associated with stronger family influence while lower social class background is linked to stronger peer influence.

Thus, the third set of hypotheses considered involvement in various sport types (i.e., team, individual, dual, and mixed). The first, which predicted that sport type was a function of socio-economic status, was verified, as team sport participants tended to come from a lower class background, while individual and dual sport participants were identified with higher social class status. The second hypothesis examined the relationship between reference group influence and type of sport participation. No relationship was found between sport type and family versus peer influence. In addition, no relationship was found when socio-economic status and type of reference group influence was examined.

Since this investigation was an overview of the topic of female sport socialization, it could not possibly exhaust all areas of potential research. Many unexplored aspects of this topic merit further attention. Such considerations involve types of research design, the research instrument, and theory reconstruction. Thus, the topic of women in sport encompasses many potential research questions which can be systematically analyzed utilizing

the perspective of the social sciences. Hopefully, future empirical endeavors related to female sport participants will use this approach.

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